

Using Health & Productivity Management as a Tool to Enhance Military Force Readiness

U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine

Health and Productivity Management (HPM) is a valuable model used by employers to increase on-the-job productivity, manage rising health care costs, and improve employee retention. Several U.S. military organizations are now exploring how HPM can be applied to achieve: increased productivity while on duty; enhanced force readiness; and increased retention of Service members.

Force readiness is the ability to accomplish a military mission (an operation assigned by a higher headquarters) and the ability to deploy -- be assigned to a different location or command other than a normal duty assignment. Obviously, health is a key component of force readiness: a healthy force is a ready force.

The Armed Forces have always made investing in human capital a priority. The duties of a Soldier, Sailor, Airman, or Marine require them to operate at peak levels of physical and mental capacity, and without injury. This level of performance must especially be sustained during times of deployment. Current world events have accelerated the rate of deployments for Active Duty, Reserve, and National Guard personnel. While force readiness is always critical, the high level of military operations at this critical time makes readiness more important now than perhaps ever before – and optimal force readiness requires healthy human capital.

The health factors that influence force readiness are many of the same modifiable health risk factors for the population at large. Tobacco use, high levels of stress, and work-related injuries reduce the effectiveness of Service members while on duty. These risk factors take on additional significance, however, in light of the unique demands of military missions. For example, tobacco use impairs night vision and coordination. The effects of poorly managed stress-- insomnia, fatigue, and anxiety -- have obvious consequences for safety. Body composition impacts stamina. Ultimately, all these factors affect mission accomplishment.

HPM is an effective strategy for addressing these risk factors and enhancing overall force readiness through improved health. A military HPM framework begins with consideration of how Service members' health impacts productivity while on duty. Sub-optimal health correlates to both absenteeism (from place of duty) and presenteeism (while on duty). The concept of presenteeism is central in this framework, because the unique demands of military missions are so dependent on optimal levels of peak performance while on duty. Recognizing the impact of

military presenteeism (decreased performance while on duty) is a critical part of applying HPM within a military environment.

The goals of HPM within the military population are enhancement of performance levels while on duty, reduction of duty time lost unnecessarily due to health issues, and reduction of total health-related costs for Service members, including medical expenditures.

The U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine (USACHPPM) has begun to examine HPM applications for military populations. USACHPPM is an important source of medical support for combat forces and the military managed-care system. The organization provides worldwide scientific expertise and services in clinical and field preventive medicine, environmental and occupational health, health promotion and wellness, epidemiology and disease surveillance, toxicology, and related laboratory sciences. USACHPPM supports readiness by keeping Soldiers fit to fight, and by promoting wellness among Soldier families and the federal civilian workforce.

USACHPPM is currently examining the impact of several ongoing health promotion programs on presenteeism. The Work Limitations Questionnaire (WLQ) was recently administered to determine the impact of a physical training program designed for a specific target population. In addition, a pilot study is planned to examine the impact of specific occupational health issues on workplace productivity.

In order for the U.S. military to maintain force readiness, healthy human capital must continue to be considered a force asset for the 21st century. The HPM model can be adapted for use in a military environment to maximize force readiness and on-duty productivity, and to link force health and mission accomplishment.

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